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FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000190

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM PREL PGOV ICC SU MR

SUBJECT: EL BASHIR'S ARREST WARRANT ELICITS MIXED REACTIONS

**¶1.** (SBU) Summary: The March 4 International Criminal Court's (ICC) decision to issue an arrest warrant against Sudanese President Omar El Bashir for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur has elicited strong reactions in Mauritania. While the majority of the political class condemns the ICC's move, describing it as further proof that the ICC is nothing but an instrument of U.S. foreign policy, local human rights groups have expressed their support and satisfaction. In a country with underlying racial tensions, where slavery is still practiced and where those responsible for the Afro-Mauritanian purges in the 90s have not been brought to justice, the decision brings both fear and hope. End summary.

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DEPUTIES AND POLITICAL PARTIES CONDEMN DECISION  
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**¶2.** (SBU) In a statement released March 4, Mauritanian parliamentarians condemned the ICC and expressed their support for El Bashir. Labeling the arrest warrant "an injustice", the deputies state it is "eloquent proof that the ICC is nothing but another tool of American foreign policy - a policy characterized by double standards, particularly in the areas of African and Arab Affairs." The communique accuses the ICC of seeking to destabilize Sudan while "refusing to even think about looking into war crimes committed by Israel in Gaza or Lebanon or by the Bush administration in Iraq and Afghanistan." According to them, the decision highlights the degree of politicization of the court, which in their view has lost all credibility. The group calls for all Arab and African nations to suspend their ICC membership and declared its unconditional solidarity with President El Bashir.

**¶3.** (SBU) The Arab Nationalist/Baathist "Sawab" party released a communique March in which it stated that "the resolution taken by the so-called 'International Criminal Court' against the Sudanese president is just one in a series of humiliations that the West and the United States of America have perpetrated against Muslims in general, and Arabs in particular." The communique went on to state that the goal of the resolution is not "to achieve justice for the victims, but to create sufficient conditions to break up the Arab Sudan lands by weakening the hold of its central authority."

**¶4.** (SBU) The Islamist "Tawassoul" party was similarly unimpressed by the ICC decision in a March 5 communique. Characterizing the ICC decision as "violation of Sudan's sovereignty," the statement asked how the ICC could at the same time "ignore crimes committed by the former Bush administration in Iraq and Afghanistan and successive governments of the Zionist entity." The statement further called on all "Arab, Islamic, and peace-loving states" to not apply the ICC resolution.

15. (SBU) On March 7, three human rights non-governmental organizations (SOS Esclaves, Association Mauritanienne des Droits de l'Homme, Association des Femmes Chefs de Familles) and a political association (Conscience et Resistance) released a joint statement entitled "Finally, the law takes precedence over the obstacles." The group declared itself "overjoyed" by the ICC's decision, reinstated its support to the people of Darfur, and called for Mauritania to support the ICC. The communique also addressed parliamentarian allegations that the ICC is an instrument of U.S. foreign policy by stating that the U.S. opposed the court's creation and accusing the deputies of being ignorant and cynical. According to the group, in Mauritania "where dozens of torturers get away with their racial crimes, the ICC's decision brings hope that the truth will come to light, and that the victims will be rehabilitated and receive redress."

16. (SBU) Comment: As a country with underlying racial tensions between Moors, black Moors and Afro-Mauritanians, it is not surprising that the ICC's decision has been decried by those in power -- who fear its potential ramifications -- and embraced by human rights organizations that work against slavery and for the rights of those who lost family members in the early 90s racial purges. Those most strongly supportive of the ICC decision are generally Black Moors or Afro-Mauritanian. It is ironic that some Mauritanians view the ICC as a tool of U.S. domination as the U.S. is critical of it and has refused to join. End comment.

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